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EGYPT'S PLEA FOR INDEPENDENCE

Egypt is beginning to occupy public attention both in neutral countries and in France and England. The vigorous representations made by the Egyptian delegation in London and at the Paris Peace Conference tended to make its aspirations no longer a purely English but also an international question. The constant disorders and revolts of the past year have now caught popular attention. Everyone recognizes the great material and administrative benefits which Egypt has derived from English rule. That country's control of the Suez Canal was a decisive advantage for the Allies in the war. Public opinion in France may sympathize with the demands of the Egyptians, but this is solely for ideal reasons. It is not a sentiment that would be permitted to disturb the friendly relations and mutual confidence between England and France, which the latter's fear of political isolation makes a first consideration in all its policies. However, the frank expression of public sentiment is a trait of free peoples. A League for Human Rights has been organized at Paris in behalf of the Egyptians; but its proceedings are characterized by great tact and moderation.

The first meeting of the League was very largely attended. The chairman opened the session by recalling to his auditors that the purpose of the French revolution was to guarantee the rights and liberties of every nation, and that this revolution itself was due to political ideals originally received from England. The discord that had, unhappily, arisen between the English Government and the Egyptian people was due to a profound misunderstanding. French democracy, therefore, sought to act as a friendly counselor to both parties and to enlighten the world as to the actual situation. If the English people once learn the real depth of the national movement in Egypt, and the uselessness of military repression, they will spontaneously insist upon a liberal solution of the difficulty. The second speaker recalled the example of the Boer War, where for a time bitter national animosity divided the two nations. Notwithstanding this, England's wise policy had brought about a complete reconciliation and the beneficent coöperation of the two peoples. An Egyptian attorney from Alexandria followed with a dispassionate description of the independence movement in his country.

The Egyptians have always felt themselves distinct from the Turkish nation. They are a people with an independent history and culture. They had attained political and military autonomy early in the nineteenth century. The labor of national reconstruction had been profoundly influenced by France.

The London Convention of 1840 was the Magna Charta upon which Egypt to-day based its case before the Allied nations. In several subsequent international negotiations Egypt was recognized as an independent government. For instance, the Suez Canal Treaty of 1869 and the Sudan Treaty of 1877 implied Egyptian autonomy. Then followed the disturbances of 1881, which were due in the first instance to Turkish discrimination against Egyptian officers and the national resentment

that followed. England intervened to protect European interests, inviting the assistance of France. The latter country committed the great error of refusing its coöperation. England proceeded very cautiously at first, and adopted the rôle of the savior of Egyptian civilization from its arch enemies. However, its provisional occupation gradually assumed the form of permanent possession. Innumerable promises by English statesmen might be quoted, assuring Egypt that British troops would be withdrawn as soon as the safety of natives and foreigners in that country permitted. In 1884 Gladstone fixed the date of withdrawal at four years later. Salisbury declared: 'We desire neither to establish a protectorate over Egypt nor to occupy that country permanently, for this would violate our promises. The war of 1914 had been accompanied by a direct repudiation of this statesman's words.

The Egyptians loyally supported the Allies. They were ready to give all possible military assistance, provided that their independence was recognized after the war. Indeed, they formally proposed this to the high commissioner in Cairo. Later, when Turkey joined the Central Powers, the Egyptians repeated their proposal. This time England replied by declaring Egypt a Protectorate. The Egyptians assumed that this was a provisional war measure and accommodated themselves to the situation, supplying both financial and military aid to the Allies. Their army was employed successfully in the defense of the Suez Canal against the Turks; it fought in Sudan against the Senussi; and Egypt contributed auxiliary forces to the Arabian campaign.

The Egyptian budget of 1917 carried an item of three million pounds sterling for war expenses. Egypt furnished one million two hundred thousand men for English auxiliary units, to guard transportation routes and build railways in Palestine. General Allenby stated publicly that Egypt had contributed materially to the success of his campaign.

The Egyptian people, therefore, looked forward to the conclusion of peace with great hope. They greeted the armistice as the dawn of their liberation. Their first national delegation was sent to London, where a British commission received them and listened to their plea. The speaker said: 'We Egyptians were so confident in the justice of our case that we did not consider it necessary to appeal to the Peace Conference. We expected England honestly to abide by its ancient promises.'

Instead of that, the English Government insisted on continuing its protectorate, and caused this to be affirmed in the Treaty of Versailles. The resentment and disappointment in Cairo were indescribable. Demonstrations occurred which were at first entirely peaceful. They were limited to cheering for the Egyptian people and for the Allies. But the English officials employed troops to disperse the demonstrators and bitterness seized upon the nation. Disorders began to break out all over the country. A new ministry was formed and for a time quiet was restored.

A second delegation, consisting of members of Parliament and prominent men in private life, proceeded to France in the hope of winning the support of the Peace Conference for their cause. However, the latter refused, for reasons easily understood, to receive them.

Weary of being repulsed by governments and high officials, advocates of Egyptian freedom appealed to public opinion of Europe and America, receiving a more sympathetic reception.

The English Government was forced to take action. The press of that country demanded it. A commission of inquiry was appointed to study upon the ground the cause of these disturbances. The people were told that a constitution was to be provided under which Egypt would cease to be a Protectorate and would gradually receive the right of self-government. But the Egyptians are offering passive resistance to any commission composed exclusively of Englishmen, asserting that no inquiry is necessary to prove that the presence of British troops is resented by the nation. The cabinet threatened to resign if the commission set foot on Egyptian soil.

New demonstrations and outbreaks occurred which were suppressed with machine guns. The delegates selected to represent the people were arrested, but later set free. A native Christian was substituted for the previous Mohammedan premier. But he did not exhibit the zeal against Islamism that was expected, and proved to be inspired by the same patriotic sentiment as his predecessor.

To-day the Egyptians will be satisfied with only one thing — independence. Their agitation has been misrepresented. Opponents have characterized their movement as hostile to Christianity, as Pan-Islam, and as pro-German. None of these charges is true. The Mohammedans and Christians are a unit. The national banner flies above either the Crescent or the Cross. Coptic priests and Jewish rabbis are preaching the brotherhood of all Egyptians in the mosques, while Muftis declare the common love of country in Christian churches. Egypt entered the war an autonomist government. It will emerge from the present crisis independent. It trusted in the ideals proclaimed by the Allies and suffered for those ideals. The day has passed when nations can be disposed of like chattels.

The closing words of the Egyptian orator were received with thunderous applause: 'The Egyptian nation is conscious of its own worth. It is the cradle of civilization. It is the original mother of your culture. The countries of the West respect it for its past. Alexandria was the lighthouse of the Middle Ages. Now, in the age of democracy we shall not appeal in vain for right and justice. We count upon the free nations of France and America. We count, above all, upon liberal England to aid us. There is an old eastern proverb: "A brave man keeps his promises." England has proved during the last five years that it is a brave nation. We expect it to make good the rest of the proverb.'